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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Wednesday, October 23, 1936

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CARE OF WOODS." Information from the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Some little pieces of wood used to build a ladder helped to send a man to the electric chair last spring. The case focussed the attention of newspaper readers for a while on the expert technical work of the Forest Products Laboratory at Madison, Wisconsin. This laboratory is maintained by the Forest Service of the United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin, for research in all the varied problems connected with the use of wood and its protection, both as standing timber and as lumber for structural use or for furniture.

Not often, perhaps, is the Forest Products Laboratory called on for anything so spectacular as criminal testimony. But in its day-to-day work, it touches every hearth and home in the land. To cite two ordinary instances: There's the daily paper on your doorstep. It's made of wood pulp, utilizing what is often waste forest material. The Forest Products Laboratory carries on extensive studies in this field. Or take the orange box on your back porch, or the crate the new bedstead came in. There's a right and a wrong way to make boxes and crates to withstand the handling they get in transportation. Experiments in "treating them rough" have determined which is which.

We can come even closer to the hearth and home. A good many of us live in houses made partly or entirely of wood. Which are the most desirable woods for the different parts of a house? For frame-work, siding, roofing? How should they be protected from weather and decay? From insects? From fire? The Forest Products Laboratory is working toward the answers to these questions or has already determined them. It urges everybody to make use of its findings. If you are in doubt as to what kind of wood to use for a given purpose, how to make wood give better service or a better product, you are invited to take up your question with the Laboratory specialists. Inquiries should be addressed to the Director of the Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin.

That's a pretty broad invitation, it seems to me, but it's the only way all the different individual problems about wood could be dealt with. When we stop and think of the inside of the house and all the wooden doors, windows, floors, mantels, baseboards, paneling, stair rails, closets, and built-in things; and then all the furniture we buy and put into our houses, it seems as if we might have plenty of questions to fire at this group of experts.

Probably we housewives are more interested in making the furniture look attractive, and are content to let the wood trimmings of the house, and the exterior condition of its woodwork remain as they are for the time being. Except

the floors. We all want nice floors, well waxed and cared for if possible, or treated at least for easiest cleaning. That's a whole subject in itself, on which I am going to talk at length some other day. But here are a few general points I've gathered for you on the care of things made of wood:

Furniture cannot simply stand forgotten after the pores have been filled and the surface polished. Wood needs to be fed with oil occasionally to keep it from drying out. A certain amount of moisture in the air is necessary to woods, also, and if the air of a room becomes too dry in a heated house in winter, it is not good for the furniture. When the moisture in the wood dries out, the parts become loose, the wood warps and cracks and the veneering may loosen. One way to restore the moisture in the air, (which is needed for ourselves as well as for the good of the furniture), is to hang a small canister of water on the radiator or place a pan of water near the heater, so that evaporation will correct the dryness of the atmosphere.

Daily and occasional care of fine furniture will help to keep the wood in good condition. The formula for an oil finish, to use in restoring old furniture, is also good for a polish to use at least once or twice a year on varnished and oiled furniture. It is simply a mixture of two parts of boiled linseed oil and one part turpentine. The oil feeds the wood. The turpentine loosens the dirt and helps the oil to penetrate the wood. This polish removes the dull foggy appearance often noticed on furniture in daily use and if the surface has fine checks on it, as often happens with varnish finishes, they will show less after polishing. Apply the mixture with a soft cloth. Wipe off all excess polish with a clean cloth, and then polish the surface by rubbing it with the grain of the wood until the wood is thoroughly dry and the fingers leave no mark on the surface. Be sure to note the point about rubbing with the grain of the wood.

Sometimes the arms of a chair or part of a much used table may show considerable soil. A good cleaning mixture consists of 1 quart of hot water, 3 tablespoons of boiled linseed oil and 1 tablespoon of turpentine. Keep this hot in a double boiler while you are using it. First wash the wood with a soft cloth dipped in the solution and then polish with a dry cloth. Finally, go over the piece with furniture polish.

A waxed surface which has been scratched or spotted may be cleaned by first washing it with turpentine and then rewaxing. You can make your own furniture wax by melting a quarter pound of pure beeswax in a double boiler. When slightly cool add a pint of spirits of turpentine and stir until it is like a thick batter. Put it into a jar to use as needed. If you add a little boiled linseed oil it will make the wax waterproof. If you want a thicker wax use more beeswax. The wax should be colored with oil paint so that it will not leave a light film on the furniture. Burnt umber will give a good color for lighter woods and jet or ivory black for darker woods. Oil paint can be bought in tubes or cans.

People often ask how to restore a varnished surface which has turned white from water or hot dishes. Rub it lightly with a piece of flannel dampened with spirits of camphor, essence of peppermint, or a drop or two of ammonia. In a few minutes rub the spot with furniture polish. The milky film that develops on a varnished surface in a damp climate is often impossible to remove. If an oil rub does not help it may be necessary to refinish the piece.

